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STATE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER ANNOUNCES EXPANDED FLUMIST AVAILABILITY TO HEALTHY CALIFORNIANS*

SACRAMENTO – FluMist brand influenza vaccine is now available to healthy Californians ages 5 through 49 from local pharmacies and some healthcare providers, State Public Health Officer Dr. Richard Joseph Jackson announced today. The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) previously restricted FluMist for healthcare providers who had direct patient care and for family caregivers of children younger than 6 months old.

“Since flu shots have been restricted to those at highest risk for serious complications from influenza, healthy kids and adults have not been able to get a flu shot this year,” Jackson said. “FluMist is a safe and effective alternative for healthy people who want to be protected from influenza.”

FluMist is a nasal spray vaccine that contains a weakened form of live influenza virus instead of the killed virus that makes up the injected flu vaccine.

To find a location that offers FluMist, call 1-866-592-4381, from 5:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. or go to www.findfluvaccine.org. After locating a pharmacy with FluMist, consumers should always phone first to ensure that FluMist is available and ask if an appointment is needed to obtain the vaccine. CDHS ordered 9,859 doses of FluMist for distribution to local health departments and clinics by the end of this month.

“The additional FluMist shipped to California will allow us to protect more children and adults and will help reduce the spread of influenza,” Jackson added.

Jackson encouraged all Californians to take the following steps to help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses:

- Stay home when you are sick to avoid contact with co-workers and friends.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Properly dispose of used tissues.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water or a hand sanitizer to help protect yourself from germs and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Stay healthy by eating nutritious foods, drinking plenty of water, exercising, getting plenty of rest and not smoking.

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Jackson also recommended pneumonia vaccine to prevent the most common cause of bacterial pneumonia, a common complication of influenza that can result in hospitalization or death. A pneumonia shot is recommended for all adults 65 years of age and older who have not previously had this vaccine and all individuals 2 to 65 years of age with chronic medical conditions who have not previously had this vaccine. Persons who have previously received pneumonia vaccine are protected and do not need another shot. All children under 2 years of age should also get a pneumonia shot as part of routine childhood immunizations.

The influenza vaccine shortage was caused when Chiron Corp., one of two influenza vaccine manufacturers that supply influenza vaccine shots to the United States, was unable to fill orders for flu vaccine this year because of manufacturing problems.

For more information about influenza and the influenza vaccine, please visit the CDHS Web site at www.dhs.ca.gov or call the toll-free Flu Vaccine Information Line at 866-470-3788 for a prerecorded message with the latest information about the availability of influenza vaccine in California. In addition, the public can call the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's toll-free flu information line 24 hours a day at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) with questions in both English and Spanish about influenza and the vaccine shortage.

*- Press Release 04-75 updated 11/24/04.

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